



County of Erie

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HEALTH ADVISORY #286

September 28, 2011

Discontinuation of Erie County K-12 School Absenteeism Reporting for the 2011-2012 School Year

Please distribute to School Superintendents, School Principals, Directors of Facilities and Maintenance, and other appropriate school personnel.

The Erie County Department of Health's (ECDOH) Epidemiology Program is discontinuing the school absenteeism surveillance system for the 2011-2012 school year. School districts are no longer asked to report daily absenteeism data to the ECDOH. However, we ask that schools continue to report any unusual illnesses or significant increases in absenteeism to ECDOH Epidemiology Program at 716-858-7697.

In 2009, in response to the H1N1 influenza pandemic, ECDOH instituted a voluntary local school absenteeism surveillance program. Through the cooperation of school districts throughout Erie County, we were able to track the spread of the H1N1 influenza virus and its impact on communities throughout our area during the spring of 2009 and during the 2009-2010 school year.

ECDOH recently evaluated the school absenteeism surveillance program. Student absenteeism was an early warning for influenza-related illness at the community level. The evaluation found that increases in all-cause student absenteeism predicted increases in influenza-like illness among Erie County residents one week later. The school absenteeism surveillance program was an essential part of the public health response to the influenza pandemic. We demonstrated that the school absenteeism surveillance system is an important component of surveillance activities when large outbreaks of illness affecting school-age children are occurring in our community.

This past school year (2010-2011), the school absenteeism surveillance system was used to monitor for continued influenza-related illness and to assess the value of the system for capturing other illness events among students during a non-pandemic year. While the school

absenteeism surveillance system did identify increased absenteeism at particular schools due to a variety of illnesses, we found that information obtained from the school absenteeism reporting system was duplicated by reports from school nurses and administrators.

After evaluating the usefulness of the school absenteeism surveillance system during a pandemic period (2009-2010) and non-pandemic period (2010-2011), we have determined that activation of the school absenteeism surveillance system is best done in the context of a large outbreak. In non-pandemic years, usual routes of communication between the school districts and the ECDOH are sufficient to monitor and respond to illness among school-aged children and others in the community. For these reasons, we have decided to discontinue the school absenteeism surveillance program for the 2011-2012 school year, but would consider reactivation of the surveillance system should the need arise with future public health emergencies.

We would like to thank the school districts for their active participation in the school absenteeism surveillance program during the past several years. We value the strong relationships we have developed with our school partners and strongly encourage you to continue to report unusual illnesses and significant increases in absenteeism promptly to the ECDOH Epidemiology Program at 716-858-7697.

Health Category Definitions:

Health Alert FLASH: conveys the highest level of importance due to a large-scale, catastrophic public health emergency; warrants immediate action or attention

Health Alert Priority: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention to a health problem or situation

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary

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